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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDANIAN ISLAMISTS TALK ABOUT CAIRO SPEECH,
ELECTORAL POLITICS, ENGAGEMENT

REF: A. AMMAN 1758
[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 140
[1](#)C. 07 AMMAN 3240

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: During a dinner on August 3, which unexpectedly included Islamist politicians, conversation focused on the President's Cairo speech, Jordanian electoral politics, and Embassy engagement with Islamist groups (Ref A). The Islamists welcomed the Cairo speech and spoke about a proposed coordinated response from the Muslim world. They wondered out loud whether the United States would recognize an Islamist electoral victory in Jordan and were highly critical of Embassy statements praising the 2007 Jordanian electoral process, which they viewed as "non-transparent and manipulated." The Islamists expressed a desire for resumed contact with the Embassy, saying that dialogue could only be developed by long-term relationships. End Summary.

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?

[1](#)2. (S/NF) PolChief and PolOff had an unexpected encounter with two Islamist politicians (Ref A) invited by a local journalist as fellow guests to a dinner party. Nabil Al-Kofahi, a former mayor of Irbid, currently serves on the Shura Council of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (JMB) and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Ruhail Gharaibeh is currently the spokesman of the JMB and serves on the Shura Council of the IAF. Both are part of the moderate wing of the Islamist movement in Jordan and spoke about a wide range of topics.

The President's Cairo Speech

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Gharaibeh and Kofahi complimented the President's Cairo speech as a welcome gesture to the Muslim world. They said it had sparked a debate within the regional Islamist movement about how to respond. While many were advocating direct engagement and open dialogue, Gharaibeh and Kofahi alleged that the administration's uneven actions in the Muslim world empowered those who felt there was little to gain from increased political contact with USG officials. They said Islamists in the region who oppose dialogue believe that the USG is capable of broad goodwill gestures to the Muslim world, but fails to back up these gestures with concrete, consistent actions to demonstrate that the war on terrorism does not amount to a war on Islam. As examples, they pointed to multiple instances of collateral damage to civilians from air attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are viewed as "attacks on innocent Muslims."

[1](#)4. (S/NF) The two Islamists mentioned that there was a move afoot to organize a formal response to match the spirit of the President's speech. Jordanian Islamists and their regional allies are considering a conference to draft a

unified statement that would address the topics raised in the President's speech and formulate a similar list of priorities and concerns for consideration by western audiences. Gharaibeh and Kofahi also spoke about their desire to engage with American Muslims through an exchange or speaker program in an effort to increase understanding.

Jordanian Electoral Politics

¶5. (S/NF) Another focus of their remarks was Jordan's 2007 parliamentary and municipal elections. Gharaibeh and Kofahi were highly critical of the Embassy's press releases following both elections, which they perceived as implicit endorsements of the results. (Note: In the middle of the actual municipal election day in 2007, the IAF announced a boycott due to alleged electoral administration irregularities and subsequently claimed that the election had been rigged (Ref B). After losing big in the November 2007 parliamentary elections, the IAF also questioned the validity of the results (Ref A). Following both elections, Embassy Amman released statements congratulating Jordan on its democratic processes. End Note.)

¶6. (S/NF) Gharaibeh and Kofahi questioned the reasons behind American support for the Jordanian political establishment, arguing that the Embassy's 2007 election press statements showed that the United States was uninterested in a democratic result if it led to the empowerment of Islamist politicians. They contrasted the U.S. endorsement of Jordan's allegedly flawed electoral process with what they claimed was a U.S. rejection of "internationally accepted"

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electoral results favoring Islamists in Gaza and Algeria. They wondered aloud if the United States would be prepared to accept an election in which the IAF came to power in Jordan through a truly democratic and internationally observed election.

Engagement

¶7. (S/NF) Noting the absence of contact in recent years, Gharaibeh and Kofahi said they would welcome the resumption of a political dialogue, albeit in a careful, methodical, behind-the-scenes manner. The Islamists notably did not make any comments about Jordanian internal politics, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or other regional developments, but stated that a more in-depth exchange would be impossible unless a trusting relationship could be established with regular embassy interlocutors. In the meantime, Kofahi urged us to keep the discussion and its contents "top secret."

Comment

¶8. (S/NF) Comment: Regular contact between the Embassy and the Islamists faded after September 11th, eventually becoming an established taboo that has since hindered our ability to gain first-hand information about the JMB and IAF. There would be political risks to renewed engagement for us and the Islamists. For the Embassy, it could negatively affect our relations with the Jordanian government, which prefers to limit our contact with Jordanian Islamists. For their part, the Islamists risk potential condemnation from hard line activists from within their own movement.

¶9. (S/NF) In spite of the risks and sensitivities, the Islamists seemed genuinely in favor of re-opening political dialogue. Gharaibeh revealed that an earlier trip to the United States that he took in February was designed to subtly signal that Jordan's Islamists were willing to talk. End Comment.
Beecroft